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SUBJECT: ^⑥ Lessons Learned Number 16 ^⑧ [4].

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1. GENERAL: This summarizes major lessons learned from experiences prior to the initial publication of "Lessons Learned" and reviews the first fifteen lessons which have been published.

2. PARTICIPATING UNITS: Every type operational combat unit of the RVNAF is represented in this summary to include infantry, artillery, armor, airborne and the para-military units (Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps) together with limited participation by the service elements of the RVNAF.

3. MISSION: Although the primary mission of all operations conducted in South Vietnam has been to destroy VC personnel and installations, there have been other missions assigned as well. Relocation of civilians (nomadic mountain tribesmen and others) to areas under firm GVN control, reconnaissance, clearing and holding a province (operations such as "Sunrise"), rescue operations, etc., are examples.

4. LESSONS LEARNED:

a. SWEEP TYPE OPERATIONS ARE INDICATIVE OF POOR INTELLIGENCE AND SHOULD BE AVOIDED. Since sweep type operations have as their mission, "Sweep the area, destroying any VC and VC installations encountered", it is apparent that intelligence which triggers the operation is not complete. Such operations produce meager results, if any, and generally result in wasted manpower and materiel. During the later phases of a counter-insurgency campaign, such type operations may be required to search out and destroy the remnants of insurgent groups but where the insurgents are militant, as in SVN, operations should be directed against specific units in order to be of greatest value. This requires adequate and timely intelligence which is a vital requirement in a counter-insurgency campaign.

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b. CONTACT ONCE GAINED MUST NEVER BE LOST: PURSUIT MUST BE RELENTLESS. It is axiomatic to state that the initiative always rests with the attacker. In counter-insurgency operations, this axiom is most significant. Since the guerrilla chooses to fight only on his own terms, once contact with the enemy is gained, he must be relentlessly pursued with superior forces until completely annihilated. A guerrilla or counter-insurgency type war can be won only by maintaining such heavy pressure on the enemy that he is unable to initiate attacks and he is eventually destroyed. In this regard, friendly forces appear to be "satisfied" with killing or wounding many VC and often PERMIT THE REMAINING ENEMY TO WITHDRAW WITH THEIR DEAD AND WOUNDED. During the withdrawal, the enemy is extremely vulnerable. A relentless pursuit by friendly forces will ensure that the withdrawing guerrilla will not survive to fight another day.

c. GROUND TACTICAL PLANS MUST PERMIT PARTICIPATING UNITS TO ORIENT ON THE ENEMY RATHER THAN TERRAIN FEATURES. Planning for counter-insurgency operations must permit immediate deviation from an assigned terrain objective (which are normally required for control purposes) in order to orient on any enemy encountered. All too frequently VC contact is lost simply because RVNAF units orient on terrain objectives and persist in following an inflexible ground tactical plan. Units must orient on the enemy and plans should permit immediate deviation from terrain objectives and other planned control measures (phase lines, boundaries, time schedules, etc.), in order to take advantage of every opportunity to destroy the enemy. This requires the ultimate in detailed joint planning to include the use of airborne command posts, reserves prepared for airmobile assault, and when contact has been made, reserves aloft in helicopters to permit desired flexibility.

d. UNITS MUST BE ROTATED ON LOCAL TYPE SECURITY MISSIONS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE HIGHEST ORDER OF OFFENSIVE CAPABILITY. Units assigned to local security type missions must be rotated to offensive operations from time to time to insure they do not lose the spirit of the offensive. The period a unit is assigned to local security is an ideal time to receive fillers, retrain, and re-equip; however, "static" units quickly lose efficiency for mobile operations and should be periodically rotated to offensive operations. This applies especially to Ranger or other specially trained units which have been assigned to the province chiefs and often perform static security missions.

e. AVAILABLE FIRE SUPPORT MUST BE USED IN THE CONDUCT OF COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS. Fire power of the Viet Cong is inferior to that of RVNAF units. In view of this fact it is essential that available

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fire support be exploited to the maximum. This includes as a minimum, mortars, artillery and air. Continuous supporting fires must be provided by proper positioning and movement of ground fire support units and close air support provided by careful planning and employment of ground and air alert aircraft, and insuring that Forward Air Guides (TAC's), strike aircraft and ground commanders can communicate. In this regard, it must be emphasized that air support complements, not replaces, fires from ground fire support units. Organic and attached fire support units must be used. When, for some reason, they cannot perform the mission, or when additional support is required, or when aircraft can quickly deliver more suitable ordnance, close air support should be employed.

f. THE SMALL UNIT LEADER MUST DISPLAY THE HIGHEST QUALITIES OF PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND LEADERSHIP. Since most VC contacts are between small RVNAF units encountering small VC units, junior leaders must seize the initiative from the VC and take whatever action is required to defeat him on the spot. These actions include but are not limited to: maneuver against the VC for subsequent destruction, pursuit, or direct frontal assault to close with the enemy and destroying him in hand to hand combat if necessary. This type action calls for the highest qualities of leadership on the part of junior leaders and must be developed by training and proper supervision.

g. HELIBORNE OPERATIONS CAN BE USED TO GREAT ADVANTAGE IN COUNTER-INCURGENCY OPERATIONS. Properly planned and executed heliborne operations generally result in tactical surprise for the attacker. Since the helicopter offers speed which can overcome the VC warning and intelligence system, tactical surprise is usually achieved. Aggressive troops air landed in carefully selected LZ's can defeat the Viet Cong before they can implement planned defense, escape, or evasion plans. Detailed planning is prerequisite to successful heliborne operations and must include: ground tactical plan, air landing plan, air movement plan, air loading plan, marshalling plan, tactical air support during the air movement and until organic fire support is established in the operational area, air-ground communications and provide for detailed briefings of participating units. (Air loading details should be reduced to SOP's for ease and simplicity). Any single facet missing or improperly considered can negate the full benefit of the helicopters.

h. PARTICIPATING TROOPS AND COMMANDERS MUST BE "CIVIC ACTION MINDED". Since the war in Vietnam is as much a battle for men's minds as it is a purely military battle, all participating units must be imbued with a sense of responsibility, both as a unit and as individuals, in the civic action program. In contact with friendly or "neutral" civilians, there can be no friction between the military and the population as a result of

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"appropriation" of food or other supplies without reimbursement; the homes of "natives" must not be violated except in cases of military necessity and women must never be molested. The initial phases of an effective military civic action program can begin at the small unit level by individual kindness and respect to the population. In many instances it can be much more; military aid men can minister to the sick and units may assist in reconstruction or the unit may "round up" livestock which has been scattered during an action. No opportunity for civic action should be overlooked. It should be borne in mind that civilians in an area, though they are reported to be VC supporters may well have been terrorized into such support. As an example of this, civilian groups have requested that they be permitted to accompany the GVN unit to another area where they can be protected from VC terrorism. Wherever possible, civic action teams should accompany units on operations to effect professional civic action and be prepared for all such eventualities. However, civic action at its best is a responsibility of each individual soldier.

1. SUSTAINED COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATIONS CAN WREST AN AREA FROM VC CONTROL. Concerted efforts on the part of small units, operating in an area for extended periods of time, can wrest control of areas from the VC. Small unit night-time ambushes, daylight surveillance missions and pursuit of every VC contact eventually make the area untenable for the VC. At the same time, support of guerrillas by the natives is prevented. Without this support and under constant attack, the VC will either be killed, captured or leave the area.


5. The foregoing is for your information and guidance.

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